

Why Won't They Tell You the Truth?

After spending almost three days traveling with and being interviewed by one of the co-writers of a very poorly written article ("Much Undone in Rebuilding Iraq, Audit says", Washington Post, August 2, 2006), I'm astounded at how distorted a good story can become and what agenda drives a paper to see only the bad side to the reconstruction effort here in Iraq. Instead of distorting the facts, let's get to the truth.

There is no flailing reconstruction effort in Iraq. The United States has rightfully invested \$20 billion in Iraq's reconstruction - in the opinion of many here, we should do more. This massive undertaking is part of a wider strategy for success in Iraq that involves the establishment of a democratic government, the development of professional Iraqi Security Forces, and the restoration of basic essential services and facilities to promote the sustained economic development of this new country.

Yes, this reconstruction effort has been challenged occasionally by security, poor materials, poor construction program management practices, and in some cases poor performance by contractors for a variety of reasons. The Department of State and Defense professionals over here, many of them civilian volunteers, and the Iraqi associates who risk their lives every day to have a future that approximates what America has today, continuously see the challenges and develop and implement solutions. This is a core part of managing construction anywhere in the world and, while somewhat more complex here, it is successfully being accomplished. Have we been guilty of poor planning and mismanagement? The answer to that is, at times, yes. But professionals constantly strive to overcome challenges that arise and we are succeeding and making Iraq better every day!

The heart of the article rests on several old statements by the Special Investigator General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) which infer these are recent or recurring problems. The SIGIR knows that, in fact, program management, construction quality, progress, and accountability have all improved significantly since the early days of the effort some three years ago. Yet, the reporters' "project problems" comments infer that these are recent issues. Such actions inflame public opinion in the United States and create resentment by the very people so many conscientious Americans over here are trying to help here in Iraq and worse, embolden our very enemies.

When I arrived here a year ago we planned to complete 3,200 reconstruction projects. Today we are focusing on the completion of 3,700 projects. We've started 3,500 of those projects and completed almost 2,800...and work is continuing! This is not a failure to meet our commitment to the Iraqi people as the article states. In some cases we are not executing the same projects—we have changed to meet new priorities of three government changes in Iraq since our arrival—but in all cases, rest assured, these projects will be completed. We discussed this at length with the reporter...and he was taking notes and recording our conversations.

We told the reporter that, while 141 health clinic construction projects were taken away from a U.S. contractor who failed to perform, they were re-awarded to Iraqi contractors

who are already demonstrating progress, have improved quality and shown their great desire to work with the United States to help Iraq improve...and they are doing so phenomenally! We did talk to the reporter about on electricity. Three-quarters of Iraq gets twice as much electricity today as they did before the war. Furthermore, we are working with the Minister of Electricity to improve the situation in Baghdad daily and have doubled the hours of power from four to eight in the capitol in the last six months in spite of the fact that demand is markedly increased with Iraqis' new ability to buy personal electrical products. What is truly amazing to me is that we took the reporter to the Nasiriyah prison project and, while it is true that we terminated the prime U.S. contractor for failure to perform, the Iraqi sub-contractor continues to work there (now directly for us) and his progress and quality have improved significantly...and he saw that! We are not turning unfinished work over to the Iraqis as he stated in his article; we are fulfilling the U.S. commitment to the people of Iraq and using Iraqis to do it!

The reporter didn't tell you about the hundreds of dedicated military and civilian professionals he saw over here working to make Iraq better, or the Iraqis who come to work every day at their own peril because they believe in what we, and they, are accomplishing together. He failed to tell you about Aseel or Salah who worked for the Corps of Engineers since we arrived in 2003, because they wanted to make their country like ours, but who were recently brutally murdered in the streets because they worked for the Americans. He never wrote about the Water Treatment Plant he visited that will provide fresh potable water to over half a million people in southern Iraq in just two more months, or the one in northern Iraq that is providing water for the 330,000 citizens of Irbil. He never told folks back home about the thousands of children that are now in 800 new or rebuilt schools, or about oil production now being back to pre-war levels and getting better everyday, or raw sewage being taken out of the streets and put back in the pipes where it belongs, or about the thousands of miles of new roads, or post offices, police stations or courthouses or... well, he just left a great deal out now, didn't he?

Why? Perhaps it's because some in the press don't want the American people to know the truth and prefer instead to only report the negative aspects of the news because "it sells papers." We deserve better from those who claim the protection of the Constitution we are fighting to support and defend. America, don't give up. You are doing much better over here than all too many of your press will tell you. If you are tired of fighting for freedom and democracy for those who so strongly long for the country we have, then think of the alternatives for a moment. Iraq will be better for our efforts and so will the world. And you are making it happen. Be proud and keep supporting this vital effort. It is the most important thing America can do.

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Multi-National Force-Iraq